



National Aeronautics and Space  
Administration  
Goddard Space Flight Center

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# ANNOUNCEMENT

## SUBJECT: Spyware

Spyware has become a significant and frustrating problem in the fight to protect data. Spyware is software that is installed on computer systems to secretly gather and relay information about users and system usage to advertisers and other interested parties. A benign piece of spyware may simply record Web browsing histories and send information to advertisers, while more malicious spyware may install key stroke loggers, and remote control or backdoor components.

Spyware can be installed in a variety of ways. "Drive-By" downloads exploit Web browser vulnerabilities to install software without the user's knowledge. "Pop-Up" downloads use pop-up advertisements such as security warnings to trick the user into installing software. Furthermore, spyware applications "piggy-back" other software downloaded from the Internet.

Although not as noticeable as viruses and worms, spyware poses a serious threat to your data. The impact of spyware can include:

- Slow internet access/Web browsing
- Web browser instability
- Corrupted files
- Stolen usernames and passwords
- Exposure of confidential personal information (SSN, tax information, credit card numbers)
- Identity theft
- Increased network bandwidth utilization
- Instability in legitimate applications
- Threats to data stored on systems (deletion, modification, copying)

Spyware is difficult to detect because it usually operates without the users knowledge. Some indicators of spyware include:

- Web browser crashes more than normal
- Anti-virus software is nonoperational (will not start up, crashes during virus scanning)
- Strange additions to Start Menu and Favorites (that may reappear when deleted)
- New, unknown applications installed
- Unwanted toolbars

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- Unwanted sexually explicit desktop icons
- New browser default home page

If you suspect your system has been compromised with spyware, contact your Computer Security Official (CSO). A list of CSO's can be found at <http://eitsb.gsfc.nasa.gov/csoListing.html>. If your system is ODIN managed, contact ODIN for assistance, x6-3100, or <http://www.odingsfc.com/default.html>.

Some general steps that can be followed in an effort to remove spyware:

1. Attempt to uninstall the spyware using Windows Add/Remove feature
2. Run your anti-virus scanning software
  - a) Anti-virus software is available through the CNE at [http://cne.gsfc.nasa.gov/application/cne\\_sppt\\_sw/](http://cne.gsfc.nasa.gov/application/cne_sppt_sw/)
3. Run at least two different spyware removal tools
  - a) Information about anti-spyware software is available through the Enterprise IT Security Branch at <http://eitsb.gsfc.nasa.gov/antiVirus.html>
4. Restart the system

To prevent Spyware related problems, abide by the following recommendations:

- The Microsoft Internet Explorer Web browser contains a wide variety of security vulnerabilities that can cause significant damage. If using Internet Explorer:
  - Consider using alternate Web browsers for most of your browsing needs (Netscape, Mozilla, Opera, etc.)
  - Raise the security settings in Internet Explorer
    - For more information, visit: <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/using/securityandprivacy/default.mspx>
- Run anti-virus and anti-spyware software at least once a week
- Use caution when browsing unofficial or non-government Web sites
- Turn off the e-mail client preview pane
- Delete unsolicited e-mail without opening
- Use caution when opening attachments unless you know who sent it, what it is, and why it was sent
- Do not download free games
- Do not download software from the Internet without prior authorization from your line manager

Currently, GSFC is in the process of procuring a Centerwide spyware removal tool. The tool will be available to all employees and possibly available for remote access/home users. The expected date for the spyware removal tool is yet to be determined.

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